

Dear Chairs Williams and Lopes, Vice Chairs Smith and Anwar, Ranking Members Polletta and Cicarella, and Members of the Housing Committee:

My name is Brook Smith and I am a resident of New Haven. I'm writing to communicate my strong support for **H.B 5208 - An Act Concerning Housing Opportunities for Justice Impacted Persons**. This bill would make it a discriminatory practice for housing providers to not consider a prospective tenant based on a criminal conviction after certain time periods. Specifically, housing authorities would not be allowed to consider convictions of misdemeanors over 3 years before the rental application, or convictions of felony over 7 years before the rental application. It is imperative that this bill passes in order to provide a second chance for many who have moved beyond convictions.

Currently in Connecticut, housing authorities can refuse to rent to any formerly incarcerated person, even for crimes committed many years ago. Barriers to reentry from the prison system are detrimental both to the formerly incarcerated and to the communities from where those individuals come. The lack of fair housing for formerly incarcerated people is a major roadblock for those trying to re-emerge in society, and it contributes heavily to the "revolving door" of homelessness and punishment—including a state recidivism rate of 34%. Even for smaller misdemeanor charges without any conviction that happened years ago — such as conviction for conduct that occurred when the applicant was a minor — under present law, an applicant may be denied housing for that reason.

Upon being released from prison, many formerly incarcerated persons are faced with the possibility of homelessness. This perpetuates a cycle of poverty that can drive people back to crime as a means for survival; in fact, access to housing was a commonly cited resource in a survey of prisoners asking what could have deterred them from crime. Furthermore, upwards of three quarters of formerly incarcerated persons in a study throughout 14 states have been denied housing on account of their criminal record. Here in Connecticut, a quarter of the homeless population were previously incarcerated. H.B. 5208 would provide a fair opportunity for re-entry.

In conclusion, I urge you to provide a second chance at housing for those who committed crimes outside of the 3 and 7 year windows as outlined in H.B 5208. Instead of subjecting formerly incarcerated Connecticut residents to a cycle of criminalization — even for minor misdemeanors committed long ago — this state should seek to make the re-entry process as smooth as possible by mitigating the hardships that come when individuals emerge from prison. I urge you to favorably vote this bill out of the Housing Committee so that a second chance may be given to those who most need it.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Brook Smith
New Haven, CT